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ON THE LOCATION OF THE LUPENIANS, A VANISHED PEOPLE OF SOUTHEAST CAUCASIA

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In Volume One of the *Annual of the Society for the Study of Caucasia*,¹ I listed and commented upon the various mentions of an elusive Christian state of ancient Caucasia, the kingdom of the Lupenians. Since the publication of that notice, I have undertaken further investigations into the few detailed citations of them and have come to certain conclusions relevant to their location that contradicts the impression of S. T. Eremyan² that I had previously followed in preparing various maps of Caucasia in the Middle Ages.³ I am indebted to Professor B. K. Harut‘yunyan, of the Department of History at the University of Erevan for bringing Eremyan’s original misunderstanding to my notice and for drawing my attention to the clarifying reference in the sources.⁴

Basing himself on the indications of Ptolemy (V.10.2), Eremyan assumed that Loubion Khōmē “Loubion village,” cited by Ptolemy as lying in Iberia, meant that, at that time (second century A.D.), the Lupenian capital, *Lp’nac’ k’alak’* in Armenian “[capital] city of the Lupenians,” had been included within the Iberian kingdom. Then, finding that the River Alazani had once been called the Laban and that a village named Lapanebi still lay on one of its tributaries, the tiny River Lop’ota, he assumed that the Lupenian country was to be found on the upper reaches of the Alazan river in the area of modern Napareuli, a village due north of T’elavi. While this seems very clear as an interpretation of Ptolemy’s datum and a reconciliation of it with modern toponymy, this localization misses entirely a major passage in the *History of the [Caucasian] Albanians* of

¹ Hewsen, R. H., The Lupenians, a Vanished Christian Kingdom of Caucasia, *Annual of the Society for the Study of Caucasia* I (Chicago, 1989).

² Eremyan, S. T., *Hayastanē ēst “Aškarhac’oyc”-i* [Armenia According to the “Aškarhac’oyc”] (Erevan, 1963, s.v. “Lp’ink”); *Aršak’uni t’agaworut’yunē 298–387 t. 4.* [The Arsacid Kingdom 298–387 A.D.], map in *Haykakan sovetakan hanragitaran* [Soviet Armenian Encyclopedia], 2 (Erevan); Aškarac’oyc’i skzbnakan bnagi verakangnman p’orj [Attempt at a Primitive Text of the Aškarhac’oyc’], *Patma-banasirut’yun handēs*, 2 (Erevan, 1973).

³ Hewsen, R. H., *Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orients, Map B VI 14. Armenia and Georgia. Christianity and Territorial Development from the 4th to the 7th Century* (Wiesbaden, 1987), 1:2000,000.

⁴ Personal conversation, February, 1996.

Dasxuranc*c*i (or Kałankatuac*c*i, II.39, hereinafter: MD), the historian of Albania (who, however, wrote his text entirely in Armenian),⁵ that makes it abundantly clear that the Lupenian capital and consequently the Lupenian kingdom, lay considerably further to the southeast, not in the territory of modern Georgia but rather well within the territory of the present Republic of Azerbaijan.

According to MD (II.39), the Albanian nobles and clergy, wishing to make peace with the Huns, who had been raiding their country, dispatched an embassy led by Israyēl, Bishop of Mec Kołmank*c*, to Varačan, the Hunnic capital, located somewhere in Daghestan, apparently rather close to the sea. Movsēs' passage is worth quoting in his own words (eliminating only certain unnecessary details not relevant to the route taken by the embassy):

“Safely escorted out of the town of Peroz-Kawat [Partaw], they crossed the River Kur, crossed the Albanian frontier, and arrived at the town of the Lp[“]ink*c* on the twelfth day ... Entering the town and lodging there, they celebrated the feast [of the Epiphany], and departing again, they passed into the country of the Čiłbk*c* at the foot of the great mountain[s]. Then the northern blasts of the winter winds raised terrible snowstorms near the summit of Mount Caucasus, and, held back for three days, they could not look up or find their way ... The man of God ... led them up the mountain called Vard-ē Gruak ... and thus they crossed the huge and gigantic summit [of the Caucasus] ... continuing their journey abroad ... they arrived after many days at the site of the ancient royal residence where St. Grigoris, the katholico of Albania and the grandson of the great Gregory, was martyred. After some days they reached the gate of Čołay which is near Darband ... they continued their long journey and came to the magnificent town of Varačan at the beginning of the forty-day fast.”

From this interesting passage, we are able to glean the following data:

1) The Albanian embassy of Bishop Israyēl was going from Partaw to Varačan, which appears to have lain on the coast of the Caspian Sea since, having crossed the Caucasus, there would be no point in going to Čołay and Darband, both on the coast, if one were going to have to reenter the mountains of Daghestan to reach Varačan.

2) Given the time of the year – the dead of winter – and the fact that the embassy crossed the mountains rather than took the longer but easier route around the range where it nearly reaches the Caspian Sea, it seems logical to assume that the party was anxious to reach Varačan as quickly as possible and was traveling in as direct a line as it could manage.

⁵ Movsēs Kałankatuac*c*i (Dasxuranc*c*i), *Patmut“wn Aluanic“* [of Moses Kałankatuac*c*i or of Dasxuren, *History of the Albanians*]; Engl. trans. C. F. J. Dowsett, *History of the Caucasian Albanians* (London, 1962).

3) Thus, the town of the *Lp^cink^c* (*Lp^cnac^c k^całak^c*), i.e. the Lupenian capital, which lay south of the mountains must have been located on a more or less direct line between the city of Partaw (whose location at modern Barda is beyond doubt) and the Caucasus range. Given the nature of that range, however, it seems equally logical that they would have crossed at a convenient pass, one that might be expected to be serviceable even in winter. To locate the Lupenian kingdom, therefore, we have only to choose the pass nearest the logical road from Partaw to a point on the coast somewhere due southeast of Darband.

4) The fact that the embassy did not pass through either Šak^cē (now Nukha) or Kapałak (now Chukhur Kabala), both prominent towns in this period and both of which still exist, greatly narrows the territory through which the embassy could have traveled. A glance at the map makes it clear that there are only two routes that pass through this general area (between Šak^cē and the Caspian coastal pass) while at the same time avoiding Šak^cē and Kapałak. The first of these would be the one that, departing from Partaw, crossed the Kur in the vicinity of modern Yevlakh and ran up the valley of the River Sani (now the Aldzigan-chai) between Šak^cē and Kapałak to where the mountain range might be crossed north of modern Vartashen (Vartašēn) and Khachmaz (Xač^cmaz), even though no actual pass exists anywhere along this sector of the Caucasus. In this case, the mountain called *Vard-ē Gruak*, could be identified with the peak now called Bazar Dyuzy (4477 m./14,698 ft.), especially since MD seems to indicate that the party had to make a detour to get to it. After this, the mission would have followed a tiny affluent of the River Samur and then passed into the long Samur valley, which, curving gently to the northeast, could have then taken the embassy to a point south of Čołay. The second route would be the one that lay to the east of both Šak^cē and Kapałak, crossing the Kur due east of Partaw at a point where the River Terter (on which Partaw is located) entered the first named river. This would undoubtedly have taken the embassy through the Shirvan Steppe in the general direction of the site of the later town of Shemakha, passing to the west of this site to reach the Pahl Gates of Eremyan's maps, i.e., the pass today called the Akhar-Bakhar. In this case, the peak called Varde-ē Gruak would probably be the one now called Mt. Dyubrar (2207 m./7247 ft.).

5) A decision as to which of these two routes the Albanian embassy took to reach the Caspian coast can be arrived at if we remember that, after crossing the mountains, the embassy did not immediately arrive at Čołay but rather at the site of a former Albanian "royal residence," where St. Grigoris, apostle of the Albanians, was martyred early in the fourth century. The site of this martyrdom, we know, was in a plain along the Sea, and MD tells us that it took "some days" after arriving at this point for the party to reach Čołay. Since the littoral route is not a difficult one, the only way that the journey to Čołay could have taken some days would be if the site of St. Grigoris' martyrdom was at a fairly important town lying some distance south of Čołay and this points to Sapotran, which lay somewhere in the vicinity of modern Kuba. Obviously, then, given the fact that the first route suggested above would involve crossing the Caucasus range

in winter where there is no real pass, the Albanian embassy must surely have chosen the Pahl Gates to cross the mountains, next descending to the Caspian Sea probably by way of the valley of the little River Atachay. From all this we can determine that the Luppenian country must have lain in the Shirvan Steppe between the Kur and Shemakha but east of Kapałak.

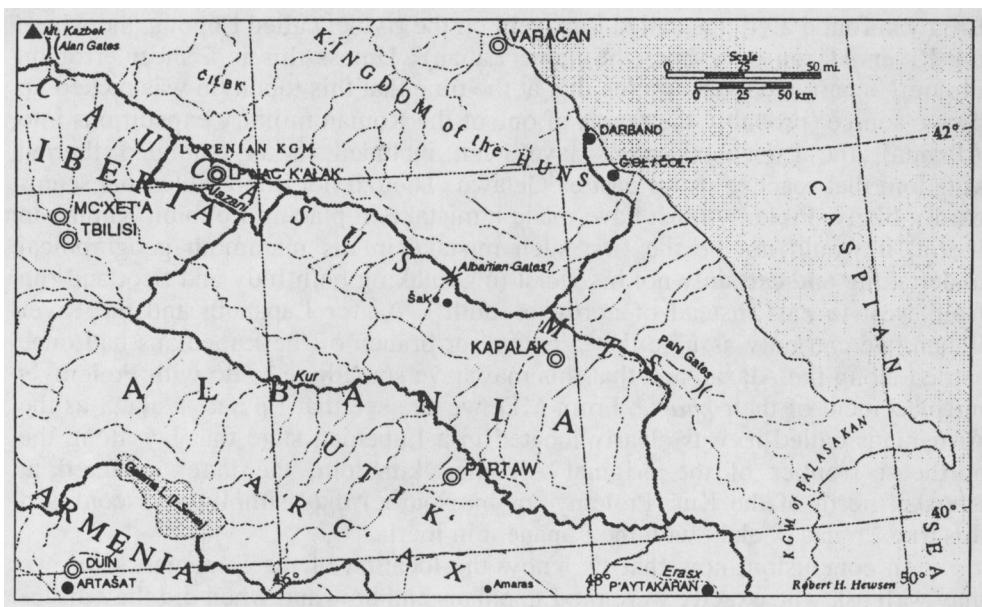
6) North of the Luppenians – but before one came to the mountains – lay the land of the Čilbk^c, probably the *Silvi* of Pliny (VI.X.28), where, indeed they are indicated as dwelling north of his “Luppenii”). Since the Čilbk^c are specifically stated by MD to have dwelled at the foot of the Caucasus range and definitely to the south of it, the location of the Luppenian country is narrowed still further to a point between the old Albanian district of Geławu (located between the Aksu and Pirsagat Rivers just south of the mountains), and the River Kur. Here, in the plain, lay two other Albanian districts: Hegeri on the Kur, itself, and to the north of it, Hambasi bordering on Geławu. MD tells us that the embassy “crossed the River Kur, crossed the Albanian frontier...” but his language at this point is too laconic to enable us to determine if the words “crossed the Albanian frontier” are a gloss on “crossed the River Kur (read: they “crossed the River Kur [i.e.] crossed the Albanian frontier”) or whether by “the Albanian frontier” another point on the journey is intended *after* the river was crossed (read: “crossed the River Kur [and then] crossed the Albanian frontier”). My guess would be that the latter is intended because, at this time (681 – in the early Arab period), the Albanian kingdom still extended north of the Kur. If there was much of a journey to the frontier of the Luppenian country after crossing the Kur, there would not have been much space for the latter between the Albanian frontier and Geławu. Of course, we could always assume that the Luppenian country was quite small but the frequent references to the Luppenians in Armenian sources (not to mention their citation by Ptolemy, Pliny, the *Tabula Peutigeriana* and the *Ravenna Anonymous*) preclude their having been a small or otherwise insignificant people. Indeed, the term “Katholicos of Albania, Lp^cink^c and Čołay” formed the *intitulatio* of the head of the Albanian Church.

7) From all this, it logically follows that the country of the Luppenians, the *Patria Lepon* of the seventh century *Anonymous Cosmography of Ravenna*, must have lain in the old Albanian district of Hegeri and Hambasi. As for the Silvians (Čilbk^c), they must have inhabited the districts of Geławu bordering the Caucasus range just south of the Pahl Gates. Curiously enough, there is no trace, whatsoever, of any village, river or mountain in this area that can now be connected with a people called Luppenians or a town called Lp^cnac^c k^całak^c. The only solution to the question of the location of the Luppenian capital is the obvious one: it is to be identified, most likely, with Shemakha – not the present Shemakha founded by the Russians, but the original Shemakha (Pers.: Shamakhi) a few kms. to the northeast, destroyed by Nadir Shah in 1734.

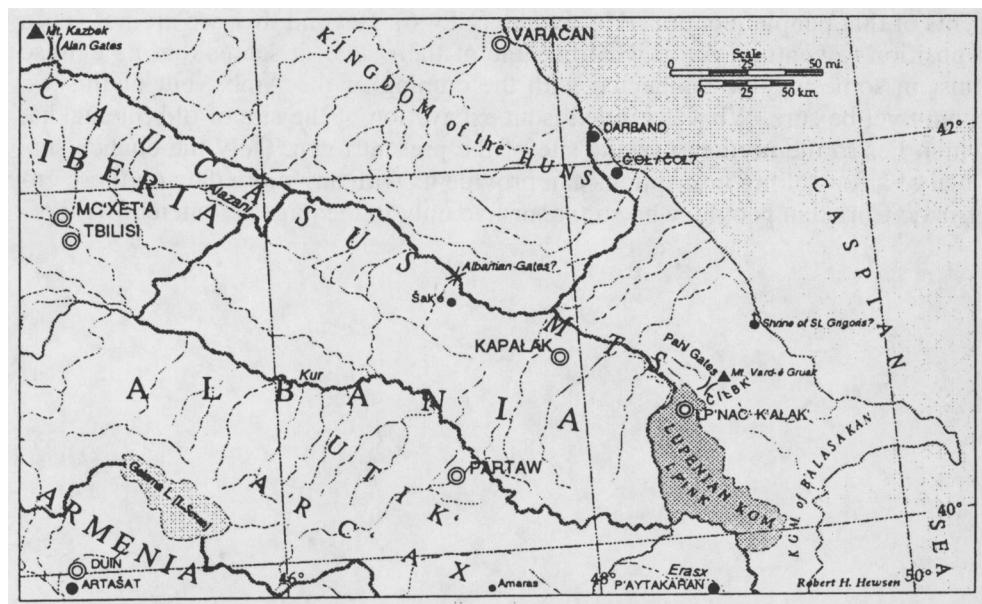
8) Yet what are we to make of Ptolemy’s assertion that Lubion Khōmē – an obvious Greek translation of the native name (whatever the Armenian Lp^cnac^c k^całak^c of MD would have been in the Luppenian language) – lay in Iberia (where

Eremyan found a village called Lapanebi on the rivulet called Lopota, and where the River Alazan once bore the name Laban)? Unless this is a sheer error on Ptolemy's part, we must assume that at the time that this toponym was picked up by his source (probably the report of one of the Roman military expeditions into Albania), the Lupenians must have been included in an extended Iberian kingdom that reached as far east as Gelawu. Though not impossible, this seems hardly likely. Ptolemy must have made a mistake in placing Loubion Khōmē in Iberia; it would not be the first such mistake in his mammoth geographical undertaking and certainly not his worst (e.g. making both Italy and Scotland run from west to east instead of north to south!). As for Lapanebi and the River Laban, we can only assume that a colony or branch of the Lupenians had once settled along the Alazan and that this may have something to do with Ptolemy's misplacement of their *khōmē*. From MD, we can see that Lp^cnac^c k^całak^c, as the Armenians called it, was clearly located in a Lupenian state that lay along the northeast frontier of the original Albanian kingdom, the latter centered at Kapałak north of the Kur; Ptolemy (or his source) may simply have confused this true Lp^cnac^c k^całak^c with the Lapanebi in Iberia.

In conclusion, now that we know the location of the Lupenian state, we may well ask who exactly were the Lupenians and how and when did they disappear? That they were a Caucasian people (as opposed to Georgians, Armenians, Iranians or Turks) seems difficult to doubt, and their close links with the Albanian people suggests that they may well have been one of the twenty-six components of that people mentioned by Strabo (XI.4.6). Beyond this, we are not yet in a position to venture. As to what became of their state, it seems that its demise must in some way be connected with the coming of the Arabs, but of this we cannot yet be sure. What is needed is an excavation of the site of old Shemakha, which lies to the northeast of the site of the present town. Only the chance survival of a few telling inscriptions can provide us with any more data on these enigmatic Christian people, who so far survive only in the pages of ancient writers.



1. The Location of the Lupenians according to S. T. Eremyan



2. The Location of the Lupenians according to Moses of Kałankaytuk (or of Dasxuran)